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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASMARA 000652

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SUBJECT: DARFUR: NONSIGNATORY GROUP IN ASMARA RAISES
CONCERNS ABOUT ARUSHA CONFERENCE

REF: 7/30 AND 7/31 ASMARA-AF/SPG E-MAILS

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

11. (C) Summary. On July 30, Charge met with representatives of the newly created Darfur non-signatory umbrella group, the United Front for Liberation and Development (UFLD) at their request. The UFLD members expressed their displeasure with the methodology used by the UN/au to allocate invitations for the August 3-5 conference in Arusha, allocations which they felt did not accurately represent the level of ground support for the UFLD organization. Despite these complaints about the Arusha framework, UFLD representatives confirmed their intention to attend the conference. In a separate meeting later that day, Dr. Taisier Ali (protect) of the Peacebuilding Center for the Horn of Africa (PCHA) said that the UFLD representatives had been extremely angered by the UN/AU selection process and, a few days earlier, had threatened to boycott Arusha and return to fighting in Darfur. Thanks to strong intervention by the Eritrean negotiators and the PCHA, the representatives finally agreed to go to Arusha. Dr. Taisier also related rumors that have been circulating in Asmara about a private deal cut between the Libyans and AU negotiator Salim Salim to ensure preferred venues for Darfur talks. End Summary.

UFLD EXPRESSES CONCERNS ABOUT ARUSHA INVITATIONS

12. (C) On July 30, Charge met with UFLD representatives to discuss their concerns about the August 2-5 non-signatory conference in Arusha. Representatives were: Khamis Abdallah Abakr, current chairman of the UFLD and head of Sudan Liberation Movement off-shoot (SLA/M); Hashim Hamad Abdelrahman also of SLA/M; Salah Mohamed Abdelrahman of the Revolutionary Democratic Front Forces (RDFF); Hassan Khamis of the National Movement for Reform and Development (NMRD); and Yasein Mohammed of the Sudanese Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA). Hashim Hamad, who served as primary spokesman, stated that all five groups comprising the UFLD would attend Arusha, but that the selection criteria for participation did not fairly represent the political realities in Darfur. Hashim said the UFLD objected to receiving their invitations per their subgroups (e.g. as SLM, RDFF, etc.) rather than as members of the UFLD, which they perceived as a slight to their new organization.

¶3. (C) Hashim further complained that the UN/AU's criteria seemed arbitrary in assigning the number of invitees for each non-signatory group. Claiming that the UFLD represents 80 percent of all forces on the ground in Darfur, they were particularly concerned with the eight invitations proffered to the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the highest allocation of invitations provided to any single group. They also objected to the selection of several individuals on the basis of being "personalities" but not truly supported by political or military backing in Darfur. Khamis cited Abdulwahid and Abdulshafi as examples, noting that both individuals are "zero on the military front".

¶4. (C) When asked by Charge what sort of accommodation the UFLD was seeking, they were unable to provide a definitive answer; however, they explained they had hoped the UN/AU would allow the groups to determine "equal representation" among themselves at Arusha. Charge noted that the conference start date was imminent and expressed doubt that the UN/AU would be able to agree on a new selection criteria and reissue invitations on time. She observed that, as a bloc, the UFLD would have a greater number of participants than any other single non-signatory group. Since the UFLD was a new group and largely unfamiliar outside of Asmara, she added, Arusha could provide an excellent opportunity for the UFLD to demonstrate its unity as a single political entity.

¶5. (C) Charge inquired about the UFLD's intentions to attend the proposed follow-on conference to be hosted by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). She also asked whether the UFLD felt it would be ready for a final mediation in September. Khamis said the UFLD does anticipate attending the SPLM conference because the agenda would be different from

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Arusha and discussions would include a broader representation of Darfur's civil society. As for a September mediation, Khamis said that the UFLD "cannot refuse, and we are ready for the peace process any place, any time." He also said that three days in Arusha was not enough time for consultations. He added that the UFLD attendees planned to return to Darfur following Arusha in order to speak their supporters and did not anticipate returning immediately to Asmara.

PCHA PROVIDES ADDITIONAL CONTEXT ON UFLD VIEWS ...

¶6. (C) Charge met separately July 30 with Dr. Taisier Ali to learn the context behind the UFLD's request for a meeting. (Note: The PCHA has worked closely with the Eritrean negotiators and Darfur non-signatories in Asmara and provides administrative space and support to the UFLD. End Note.) Dr. Taisier said that the UFLD members had been extremely agitated following the UN/AU issuance of Arusha invitations. On Friday, July 28, the UFLD members had threatened to boycott Arusha altogether and return to fighting in Darfur. Dr. Taisier said that he and Eritrean negotiator Abdella Jabir had spent most of Friday and Saturday urging the UFLD to go to Arusha despite the group's reservations. As of the morning of July 30, Dr. Taisier confirmed that all groups had agreed to send representatives to Arusha. To ensure this commitment, Dr. Taisier was pressing each group to immediately provide the PCHA with the names of their attendees so that he could pass this information to the UN/AU.

AND PASSES ON RUMORS OF LIBYAN MEDDLING

¶7. (C) On July 31, Dr. Taisier contacted Charge to express his concerns about a discrepancy with the names of the four attendees for the SLM/A-Unity Command which had been submitted to the UN/AU. (Note: The SLM/A's elected representative for negotiations, Sharif Harir, had been in

Asmara during most of the formation of the UFLD but at the end of July had traveled to Oslo for medical treatment. The SLM/A's elected chairman Abdallah Yahia was in Tripoli. Dr. Taisier noted that Sharif and Yahia were communicating regularly. End Note.) According to Dr. Taisier, the SLM/A in Asmara had submitted its four attendees to the UN/AU on July 30. This list, which included Sharif and Yahia, had been vetted with the SLM/A commanders in Darfur. Following the submission of these names, the UN/AU informed Dr. Taisier they had received a different attendee list from Yahia in Tripoli. The second list did not include Sharif. According to Dr. Taisier, the SLM/A believes the Libyans pressured Yahia into replacing Sharif with another representative more sympathetic to Libyan views. Rumors were also circulating that Yahia had been refused exit permission from Tripoli several times. Dr. Taisier commented that he personally felt the exclusion of Sharif from Arusha to be a mistake. Sharif had been elected by the SLM/A in May to serve as its negotiator and foreign relations representative. Dr. Taisier added that the SLM/A commanders were unhappy about Sharif's exclusion and intended to issue a public statement should the issue not be resolved. (Note: The commanders issued a statement August 2 affirming both Abdallah Yahia and Sharif Harir as authorized SLM/A representatives. End Note.)

18. (C) Dr. Taisier also stated that many Sudanese, including members of the UFLD, believe AU Envoy Salim Salim had reached a private agreement with the Libyans. According to the rumors, Salim Salim cut a deal in which Arusha would serve as the venue of the non-signatory conference in exchange for his support for Tripoli as the venue for a final mediation. Dr. Taisier noted that Salim Salim owns a ranch in Arusha and according to the rumors, Salim had been angling to hold the Arusha talks there. Charge inquired how such a deal could be possible given that the UN shares oversight of the Darfur process with the AU. Dr. Taisier noted that, whether true or not, many people believe that UN Envoy Jan Eliasson has deferred much of the substantial decision-making to Salim, given Salim's expertise on African matters.

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COMMENT

19. (C) Dark rumors of Libyan and AU underhanded dealings could be reasonably expected from an Asmara vantage point. The rumors mesh neatly with the worldview of the Eritreans, who remain suspicious of Libyan intentions and harbor an intense dislike for both the AU and Salim Salim. Even the Eritrean negotiators admitted their unhappiness with the decision to hold the non-signatory conference in Arusha versus their preferred venue of N'djamena. Any proof that the Arusha venue was selected in accordance with a secret deal between the Libyans and AU would suit them nicely. What makes this rumor interesting is Dr. Taisier's assertions that many of his Sudanese contacts (including offshore Sudanese businessmen which he terms "very reliable") also believe the reports of Libyan meddling. Nonetheless, according to Dr. Taisier, the Eritreans played a constructive role in keeping the UFLD and its sub-groups engaged in the process regardless of their own suspicions and displeasure with the meeting venue of Arusha. End Comment.

MCINTYRE